

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

Program has some of 'write' stuff

"Rightwriter" may be the "write" stuff if you want to create the right impression with an important letter.

This \$95 program for IBM PCs and PC-compatible computers literally proofreads your documents and points out errors of grammar, style, usage and punctuation. It starts where ordinary spell-checking programs leave off.

Initially, I was impressed with Rightwriter's capabilities. However, on repeated use, my infatuation waned.

The program, produced by RightSoft Inc. of Sarasota, Fla., spots everything from negative wording to overuse of jargon and cliches, suggests ways to tighten up vague or ambiguous phrases, and even offers a Readability Index that judges what grade education is needed to understand the document. This arti-

cle, incidentally, was judged at grade 12.

Also, the program inserts its suggestions directly into a copy of your text, then follows it with a summary and overall critique of the document.

Here are some key highlights, followed by some drawbacks:

- ✓ It suggests alternatives. If your text contains sentences that begin with pronouns such as "it," Rightwriter will suggest starting with nouns or verbs. And writers in the habit of qualifying their statements with terms like "it would seem" and "in my opinion" will trigger Rightwriter responses of "weak" and "consider omitting!"

- ✓ It flags long sentences. Rightwriter points out all sentences over 22 words long. A Department

of Defense study declares that these sentences are difficult to read and understand. This may not be appropriate in all business writing, but it can still be useful as an editing tool.

- ✓ It suggests that you reconsider using many cliches, colloquialisms, legal or formal terms, jargon, and sexist expressions. You may, however, find Rightwriter's constant and repeated pinpointing of your favorite expressions to be bothersome.

On the negative side:

- ✓ It does not catch two of the most common types of errors: changes in tense and inconsistent use of singular and plural. For example, if a sentence starts out in the past or future tense and finishes up in the present tense, the program should scream! And if I write, "they both is" or "the item are," the program should recognize the problem. Unfortunately, it doesn't.

- ✓ Even though Rightwriter

works very easily with WordStar, Perfect Writer and a few other word processing programs, it is more difficult to use with the three most common word processing programs used in business offices: WordPerfect, MultiMate and Microsoft Word. Changes to the marked text on these three can only be made by printing out a marked copy of the document and making changes to the original text.

All in all, Rightwriter probably will be only marginally helpful for day-to-day business writing. For an occasional masterpiece, however, it could be a worthwhile confidence-builder. And for high school and college students, it is probably an excellent tool.

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